

pains to hide her ridiculous partiality for him.¹ The handwriting of the letter was disguised, yet not so much but that I was able to discover whose it was. I found, however, in the manner in which the secret was expressed a warmth of zeal and a picturesque style that did not belong to the author of the letter. While reading it, I all of a sudden suspected it was a counterfeit, and intended to mislead the Emperor. I communicated my idea to him, and the danger I perceived in this fraud. As I grew more and more animated I found plausible reasons enough to throw the Emperor himself into some uncertainty. [£] How is it possible/ I said, 'that-----

I should have been imprudent enough to write such things to

1 me, who am not his friend, and who have had so little connection with him? How can one suppose that the Empress should forget herself, in such circumstances, so far as to manifest aversion to you, and, still more, to cast herself away upon

I a man who undoubtedly still possesses some power to please, but who is no longer young, whose face is disfigured, and whose person, altogether, has nothing agreeable in it?'—

j 'But/ answered the Emperor, ' is attached to me; and though he is not your friend, the postscript sufficiently explains the motive of the confidence he places in you.' The following words were, in fact, written at the bottom of the

ⁱ The part taken by Maria Louisa at this period should be studied in the Memoirs of Meneval, for long secretary to Napoleon from the disgrace of Bourrienne until after the retreat from Moscow, when, having fallen into bad health, he was placed by Napoleon with Maria Louisa as chief secretary. He himself was naturally looked on with great suspicion by the Austrians, who called him "the man of the Emperor," and he was prevented from having much to do with the Empress; but he attempted to work on the feelings of Maria Louisa to get her to try to proceed to France, where, as he truly said, she would have been looked on as an angel of peace. Meneval does not go so far as the letter here quoted on the infatuation of his mistress for the one-eyed Count Neipperg, but he refers to the influence her chamberlain was obtaining over her. It is curious that the Austrians allowed Meneval to proceed to France to join Napoleon, and his account leaves an impression as if the Austrians, though anxious to retain Maria Louisa and her son, were not quite so determined on their line of action as Metternich would make us believe. Thus Meneval (tome ii. p. 249) says that on the receipt of the news of the landing of Napoleon, "the Emperor Francis, reassured about Italy, then said to his daughter that if the Emperor Napoleon, contrary to all probability, succeeded, he would not allow her to go to France till experience had shown that the pacific disposition of Napoleon could be trusted. The first thoughts of this Prince were good, but his good sense and his natural honesty always yielded to the

requirements of his policy."